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THE
EARLY
HISTORY OF

MILLINGTON
TENNESSEE



FORWARD

This was not intended to be a scholarly historical document. It is instead an act of love for a small country town and the people who lived in it.

Many years ago (in the 1930's) my husband, Jim, and I spent many afternoons interviewing elderly people none of whom are now living. They all knew Millington from its earliest days.

The purpose of this paper was three-fold. (1) To make a permanent record of the names of early citizens (2) to show to later generations the early occupations and business interests of these citizens (3) to show the unity of the town and the co-operative spirit and help given to every project worthwhile for the towns improvement.

Thelma Sigler Williams

May, 1975



The Author Stands On The Running Board Of The First Cadillac In Millington

The town of Millington is much younger than her neighboring communities. While there were settlements at Kerrville, Cuba and Lucy, the present site of Millington was just a swamp and there was no town. Before the Civil War, perhaps as early as 1854, a small settlement grew up around a store and blacksmith shop at Millwood. Millwood was about one-fourth of a mile north of the present town of Millington, where a group of filling stations now stand. It was the voting precinct for this district. The settlement was on what is now called the Jefferson Davis Highway but was then called the Memphis to Kerrville road.

The road to Memphis was plank on one side and dirt on the other. The plank road was on the right going toward the city so the heavily loaded cotton wagons would not become stuck in the mud. The empty wagons, coming from the city, had to travel on dirt. During the Civil War and as late as 1868 a toll was charged on this road. As late as 1870 there were no bridges across Loosahatchie and Wolf rivers but one had to use the ferry. Going to Memphis was an expensive thing. The charge at the toll gate and at each river was ten cents for horse and buggy, fifteen cents for a two horse wagon, and twenty-five cents for a four-horse wagon.

In 1873, the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad (the Illinois-Central today) built a line into Memphis. On July 4th, 1873, the first train ran from Memphis to Covington over this new line. Along the railroad a new settlement was being made. It was called Glencoe (about one-half mile south of Millington). The chief industries of the town were a saw mill and gin owned by L. C. McCaughn and his sons, J. K. and W. A. McCaughn. There was also a store owned by Sam Eckols.

Even though on the new railroad, the joy of these early settlers was soon dampened. They had built their houses near Big Creek and since there were no drainage ditches and the land was low, there were frequent overflows. The settlers were in despair. They did not want to leave the railroad but the overflows demanded that something be done. Then a generous citizen, living near, offered a solution to the problem. He and his wife owned a

plantation of about five thousand acres. The railroad ran through his land and part of his land was higher than Glencoe. He offered to give the land for a railroad station and help build it, if the people would change the name of the new town to Millington. The donors of the land were Mr. and Mrs. George Millington.

Then the business men of Glencoe were unwilling to accept this offer. If the railroad station was moved their property would be worthless. Mr. Millington met this difficulty by giving Mr. McCaughn land for his saw mill, gin and home if he would consent to the moving of the town.

In 1877 or 1878, the town was moved to its present site and named Millington. The first house was built by Mr. McCaughn.

George Millington had married Miss Wade Bolton and the new site for the town of Millington was a part of the Wade Bolton plantation. This same Wade Bolton had given the land for the school at Bolton College. Mr. and Mrs. George Millington built a house in what is now Millington but was then outside of town. The oldest living citizen in Millington today, who was born in the original town and lived here continuously, is Mrs. Ura Crenshaw (nee Helen Anderson, a great niece of Mrs. Millington). The first white girl born in the town limits was Ida Harrold (later Mrs. T. C. Graves, wife of Dr. T. C. Graves, now deceased). Two early merchants in the town were Jack and Bill Easley. The Jack Easley house is the oldest house now standing. It is the location of the Val Williams Insurance Agency.

The growth of Millington developed in the normal American way of little towns. There was little change until about 1890 when Shanks and Leppelman built a pump and screen door factory. This proved the high point in the industrial development of the town. It brought many people into the town to live and it gave work to many others living in the country. The factory at one time was about to fail but was refinanced and the people were quite happy over the saving of this industry. This factory operated for about fifteen years and many of the houses in old Millington



Woods and Hornsby Sawmill

were built at that time. Later Woods and Hornsby saw mill gave employment to many. (C. M. Gooch was once an employee of Woods Lumber Company). The Gooch Scholarship Program in Memphis has helped in the higher education of hundreds.

Some of the early families not mentioned elsewhere were: Ed Pennington (land owner), Ed Black (land owner), Mr. Clement (merchant), O. C. Branch (merchant), Omega Branch (merchant), Mrs. Hosea (bookkeeper, Woods and Hornsby Mill), Dr. N. B. McCormick, Dr. Ed Chambers, Dr. H. L. Ellison, Dr. B. L. Jeter, Dr. W. H. Bolton, Jim Oglesby (logger), John Oglesby (land owner), William Anderson (land owner), Charlie Bartlett (merchant) and Mrs. Charlie Bartlett (Miss Alma) was the first woman to drive a school bus in this area. The Lee Davidson family, the Dillon family, N. L. Flournoy (President of Millington Bank), Fred Clampitt (cashier of Bank of Millington), C. B. Cook (depot agent), Ira Crenshaw (pressing shop), Ura Crenshaw (carpenter), Wilford Bland (Harrolds Store), Joe Crenshaw (Supervisor County

Workhouse), Mr. Stevens (operated railroad water plant), the Andrews Family (land owners), John Robinson (blacksmith), Genie Hicks (electrician), Elton White (blacksmith), Altom Keathly (undertaker), L. A. Lutton (icehouse), O. L. Pace (carpenter), Mrs. Myrtle Allen (music teacher), Mrs. Etherly, Jess Whitaker (barber), Al Whitaker (shoe repair), Frank Hill (Manager of Memphis Power and Light Office), C. C. Percer (had a small mill before Woods and Hornsby. The boys used his mill pond as a swimming pool). Noblin (railroad maintenance), Bob Hornsby (lumber), T. Goin (railroad signal maintenance), H. Goin (restaurant), Egbert Ray (deputy sheriff), Joe Hill (town marshal for many years, also owned jewelry and bicycle shop), John Lowe (later town marshal), John Hall (grist mill). There was also a livery stable where vehicles were rented by the hour or the day. Drivers were furnished if desired. This service was important to salesmen (called drummers) who came to town on the train and sold to stores in the surrounding country. For many years Fred Corbitt operated this business. The three cotton gins were owned by Harold, Sigler and O. C. Branch. Mrs. Martha Talley operated the first boarding house for overnight guests - also for meals. It was located near the depot for the convenience of travelers. The first drugstore was owned by Dr. Martin, followed by Dr. Price then Dr. Barrow, later Dr. Polk then Woody Hicks and his wife (the former Flora Pennington). Tobe Smith (an early town marshal who rang the curfew at 9 P. M. for school children to get off the streets), Bob Miller (insurance, later Val E. Williams, Sr., (Insurance), the Womack and Neal families, Barrett Hall (builder), Mr. Flippin and Mr. Bivens were early depot agents.

The first school was a one room frame building located where the present high school building now is. The building was surrounded by woods. The children sat on long benches and were much elated when they got desks. Heat was furnished by an old open front wood-burning stove. This was a long stove that burned wood cut at a length of three feet. The school was ungraded. When it was graded, Willie Wilson and W. A. Sigler were among the ones put in the first eighth grade. A knowledge of arithmetic and reading were used as a basis for the grading. Soon the enroll-

ment grew until a second room was added, also a second teacher. These two rooms were later enlarged into a frame building with four rooms down stairs and a concert hall upstairs. The school had eleven grades.

Although the twelfth grade was authorized in 1910, the first graduating class from the 12-grade school was in 1911. The class had two members, Juanita Monasco (Mrs. Lofton Davidson) and Gertrude Anderson (Mrs. Clyde Jameson). Their commencement exercises were held in the Methodist Church. The first brick school building was built in 1907. The last graduating class in this building was in 1916. There were five in this class with a high school enrollment of 33. The five seniors were Martha Chambers (Mrs. Harold Lovett), Annie Laura Armour, Lois Ward (Mrs. Herbert Hood, Sr.), Dewey Byrd and Jim Williams. Another graduating class of five (5) prior to this had Dr. L. T. Bolton, Dr. Cecil Ward, May Crenshaw (Mrs. Vernon Trobaugh), Ina Crenshaw (Mrs. Clarence Fleming), and Rufus Branch.



Early Millington's School Members

Although the present high school has had several additions, the central part of the building was completed for commencement

in 1917. During the building of this school, classes were held in the churches and nearby houses. Millington was proud of this big, new consolidated school and the citizens had a florist to come from Memphis and decorate for this first graduation in the new building. Included among these seniors were Sadie Ellison (Mrs. B. U. Scott), Lucille Harrold (Mrs. Rodney Johnson), Sue Aycock (Mrs. C. A. Davis, Sr.), Gladys Jeter (Mrs. Gladys Riggs), Gladys Miller, Zola M. Hooks (Mrs. Wooten), W. G. Lucado, Howard Chambers, Conrad McDaniel, Polk Redman and Heber Hornsby. Some of the local members of the Shelby County Board of Education who had worked hard for the school house were Eugene Woods, Sr., Dr. Ed Chambers, John Aycock and E. A. Harrold. The town floated bonds to help in building the school, not built entirely by county funds.



Early Millington's School Enrollment

Some of the local members of the Shelby County Board of Education who had worked hard for the school house were Eugene Woods, Sr., Dr. Ed Chambers, John Aycock and E. A. Harrold. The town floated bonds to help in building the school, the only school not built entirely by county funds.

In the early days the school was not just an educational center but a community center. All church services were held in the school building. The ladies, with ice cream suppers and strawberry festivals, bought an organ for these church services. (This was of course an old pump organ). Worship services were in the afternoon and they were always union meetings.

In 1888, Fullbright and Young held a revival. At the close of this revival the Baptists organized a church. They continued to hold services in the school for two years. In 1890, Mr. W. E. Polk donated some logs and Mr. McCaughen sawed the logs and the first church in Millington was built. This building has been remodeled but is still standing on Wilkinsville Road. The ladies played an important part in the early community life. The Baptist Missionary Society, by more ice cream suppers and strawberry festivals built the parsonage. They also acted as janitor for the new church, two ladies serving each week.



The Millington Church

The Methodists worshipped in the Baptist Church for a few

years, then they built a church quite near. The land was given by the George Millingtons. This church was planned and financed by Ed Corbitt, William Warde, Mr. Shipp, W. A. Sigler, Sr., John Wilson and Mrs. Martha Talley. Mr. John Wilson was Millington's last surviving Veteran of the Confederate Army. The "Campbelite" Church was later built across from the high school. No services were held after the early part of the 1900's. The other churches in town have been built since World War II. For many years the Sunday worship services and Wednesday night prayer meetings were held in the Baptist and Methodist Churches on alternating weeks. These services were attended by both congregations. The beloved and saintly Baptist minister for many years, Rev. B. W. Brown, was loved and revered by all.

The town of Millington was incorporated April 3, 1903. An attempt to incorporate the town had been made in January 1881. The object was to regulate the sale of liquor. It lost by one vote, 12 for, 13 against. The first Mayor was W. E. Polk. Alice Crenshaw was Marshal and B. S. Harmon was Treasurer. The Aldermen were B. S. Harmon, Dr. W. H. Bolton, E. E. Martin, J. A. Anderson, D. C. Jennings, J. W. Craddock and W. T. Jackson. The first act of the new administration was the building of plank sidewalks. This quote was taken from the minutes of one of the first town meetings: "At a meeting of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen held at the K of P Hall, W. E. Polk Mayor, presiding. Motion made and carried that a committee be appointed to fix the rate of poll and other taxable property and to secure location and cost of station house. J. W. Craddock, E. E. Martin and J. A. Anderson were appointed. W. T. Jackson, W. H. Bolton and D. C. Jennings were appointed as Street Committee. The salary of the Marshal was fixed at \$30.00 per month and all cost for amounts up to, or to make his salary \$45.00 per month and any over that amount is to go to the Corporation. There being no further business, adjourned."

W. E. Polk, Mayor

B. S. Harmon, Sec.-Treas.

May 4/1903

Some of the early mayors were George Pryor, Sam Birchfield, Joe Page and Will Hornsby. (Later mayors have been A. C. Buford, Ura Crenshaw, Charles Baker, Coleman Smith, Charles Pruitte, and Tom Hall).

Millington, a small country town, developed great civic pride. The citizens worked hard to have the best for their town. Their cooperation, interest and initiative was evidenced in many ways: (1) The Water System - The Millington Water Company was organized to buy water mains and tanks when the pump factory left. (Millington had first gotten her water supply when the pump factory came). When the Millington Water Company came into the possession of Ed Warde, he added a light plant. The lights would come on at dark and go out at ten o'clock. This hour was eventually extended to eleven o'clock and twelve on Saturday nights. At twenty minutes to eleven the lights would blink to give warning. The town of Millington did not take over the water plant until 1920. The Memphis Power and Light Company came May 1, 1925. (2) The Telephone - A group of local citizens organized the Millington Telephone Company. The first president was W. H. Bass. This system gave the first telephone service to the town and surrounding country. It not only gave telephone service, the exchange was an information center. The exchange was closed at night; however, someone slept there and in an emergency a call could be made. The type phone used was the old type hung on the wall that had to be rung to get the operator to answer. (3) Bus Service - Before the big bus lines gave the bus service they now give, there was a local bus line running to Memphis. It was called the Bluebird Line and was owned by Mr. W. E. Aycock. (4) The Gymnasium - The citizens of the town wanted a gym. County funds at that time were not available. The townsmen were not daunted, they got together, raised the money and built their own gym. It served the school and community until the present building was erected in the middle 1930's.

Across the years there have been many good things to show the fine spirit of the community: (1) The Millington Parent-Teacher Association was organized in 1913 with Mrs. George Pryor

president. There were only eight members at the first meeting. The ladies worked hard to buy things needed for the school. They were responsible for starting the first lunchroom. Before the county health program was as broad as it now is, the PTA was responsible for a health program for school children. Many children, who would have otherwise been neglected, had their tonsils out at PTA expense. At one time they sponsored a canning program and people came to the school to use the canner there. This organization grew until it could boast of the largest membership in the county. Millington PTA furnished three county council presidents, a state corresponding secretary and treasurer, and members of the State Board. Mrs. C. A. Jameson and Mrs. L. J. Kerr's names are closely associated with Millington PTA. (2) Each Christmas there was a community Christmas tree in the old Baptist Church. Everyone including Santa Claus, came. (3) An event looked forward to from year to year was the Millington Fair. It was held on the school campus. All of North Shelby participated. It was a typical fair from apple cider, to three legged races, to the showing of fine stock, foods, and needle work.

Millington boasts of its first in two things of which it is justly proud. (1) The first bus to bring children to school in Shelby County was in Millington. It was called a wagonette, was drawn by mules, and was heated by a coal-oil stove in a center aisle. (Seats were on either side facing each other). One of the early drivers was Mr. Jim Gray. (2) One of the proudest moments of the community was when the school became accredited. It was the first accredited school in the county, including Memphis.

The cultural life was not neglected. In the old brick school building there was a library and music room on the first floor. The citizens used this library. There was an active Garden Club. It sponsored flower shows in the Scout cabin, located near the school campus. (This attractive log cabin, with its landscaped grounds, had been built through the labor and efforts of the late B. L. Howard). The Garden Club, cooperating with the beautification committee of the PTA, landscaped the school campus, the church grounds and planted blooming shrubs at the approaches to the

town. There was a definite interest in home beautification. About 1930 Millington organized her first Federated Club, the "Book Chat Club." Its influence was felt in the cultural life of the town. Everyone looked forward to the annual Book Club Play. Through the production of plays, money was raised for its projects. This money was used to buy needed things for the school (a curtain for the stage, furnishings for a "sick room", etc.). Later a Little Theater Group was formed. They were quite famous locally. They were quite famous locally. They first used a building east of the railroad for their theater, then a building at old Park Field. Some of the stars were Nina Chambers, Eleanor Osteen, Martha Whitaker Erickson, Irene Caldwell, Judy Witherington Griffin, Joe Crenshaw, Buck Thompson, Ben Bass, Herman Osteen, A. K. McCalla, Charlyne Harris (Mrs. Monroe Carney) was director. They called themselves the Town Hall Players. Their most famous production was "The Drunkard". There was audience participation. Movies began in the 1940's. However, no history of Millington would be complete without reference to the old open airdome theater operated by Martin Williams. It was located across from the Strand, had long benches, without backs and was used only in the summer. It was in the silent movie days about 1912. Later Emery (Dinty) Moore had a picture show in a building east of the railroad, the building even had a balcony. It was the delight of all the children. The teenagers had their entertainment in the homes and school. Hayrides and "gypsy teas" were popular. Summer activity was meeting the train and waiting at the post office for the mail (or male). Another favorite gathering place for the young was the soda fountain at the drugstore. Listening and dancing to the music of a victrola in the homes was a Friday and Saturday night diversion.

An interest that unified the town for many years was athletics. Before the high school had football, basketball was the great sport. Millington had many champion boys and girls teams. One year the boys won the state championship. Records were also made in track. A few of these outstanding athletes were Edwin and Maurice Corbitt, W. H. Bass, Will Hornsby, Jr., William Baker and Eugene Tucker. Another pride of the town was a famous

baseball team of adults sponsored by local businessmen. Eugene Woods, Sr., bought uniforms. They played and won games from Memphis to Kentucky to Illinois. Everyone went to see them play. The baseball diamond was located on the corner of Church and



The Millington Champion Baseball Team

Easley Streets. Local people built a grandstand. Among the stars of the game were Richard Aycock, Boyce Williams, Jim Corbitt, Rob and Al Sigler, Rufus Branch, Harry Aycock, Heber Hornsby, Harold Black, Inman Turpin and Elmer George. They played 43 games, lost one and tied one. The Kitty League was composed of teams from Illinois, Kentucky and Tennessee. There have been several town newspapers. The first was edited by Mrs. Ella Ward Allen (later Mrs. Bullfin). Her husband set type and operated an old hand press. Transportation to Memphis was by train. "Miss Ella" was always at the depot to get the news when the morning and evening "accomodation" ran. (It was sometimes called the "Whiskey Dick.") At a very young age, Eugenia Woods (Mrs. Rank Weathersley) entertained the town with her original one page edition. There was a Millington Enterprise for a short period, then the Millington Star.



An Early Locomotive Steams Through Millington

So before World War II Millington was like many other sleepy towns throughout America. Memphis was her city, but everyone in the little town knew everyone else. Her population was about 1000. She had great pride in her sons who had gone forth to make themselves felt in the economic and financial world. She glowed with the accomplishments of her sons and in the medical and other professions. There was joy when a local student at U. T., Rufus Branch, made All-American in football. She proudly told of honors in the fraternal world, one citizen being Grand Master of the state in the Masonic Lodge (Dr. C. W. Polk) and one State Matron was a former citizen, Mrs. Louis Polk (nee Verlie Davidson). When Memphis won national honors as "City Beautiful" the Chairman was a former Millington girl, Mrs. Will Fowler (nee Margaret Williams). When the war came her sons went forth -- many did not come back, so gold stars were put by the names of Dan Bland, Dr. Leslie Bolton, Julian Braden, W. D. Croft, Edward Hill, Cheeley Howard and Bill Knight. Bill Dunavant came back from the European Theater of War, later to give his life in the Korean Conflict.

So the friendly little town came to 1941. Then changes came rapidly. The French and English Governments bought farmland west of town for a project. After the United States got in the war, this project was taken over by our Government to become the Chickasaw Ordnance Plant. The town had not settled down from this new influx of people until more farmland were being bought east of town from the Naval Air Station. A small part of this land was the old Army Air Base, known as Park Field, and operated



One Of The First Military Aircraft At Millington's Park Field

during World War I. The Naval Base was opened September 1942. The town was over-run by many people. Valiantly it sought to meet the expanding needs, aware that all of its facilities were inadequate. Navy Road was opened up, new business houses began to appear. A local Red Cross Unit was organized. It worked at surgical dressing, canteen, and home nursing. When the Naval Base opened, there were no recreational facilities, so the local Red Cross Unit (Chairman, Mrs. Jim Williams) was asked to open a place of recreation. With all the women and their husbands working, an attractive center was soon opened in the vacant store building east of the railroad. Some of the faithful volunteers in this work were Mrs. W. D. Bland, Mrs. Owen Blankenship, Miss Norma

Scott, Mrs. Lee Quinn, Mrs. Marion Uffelman, Miss Sara Roberson and Mrs. Beverly Hobson. It was open every night and Sundays. Materials were begged, borrowed or stolen until there was a juke box, piano, writing desks, ping-pong table, games, home cooked cakes and cookies — all free. This center filled a need until recreational centers on the base could be opened. The Naval Hospital soon was over run with battle front casualties. At the first class of Grey Ladies, many Millington ladies responded and worked one day a week until after the war when Red Cross workers became available. They wrote letters, gave parties, made hotel and transportation reservations and wrapped Christmas packages. Since the motor corps did not come to Millington, they enlisted the citizens of Millington and many cars always appeared at the proper time to take patients to the MOAT, to the Christmas Parade, Cotton Carnival, football games and skating vanities. One car always present to help was that of Max Danavant. Some of the Millington ladies in this first class of Grey Ladies were Mrs. B. U. Scott, Mrs. Eugene Woods, Jr., Mrs. Val E. Williams, Mrs. Richard Aycock, Mrs. Ed Cole Harrold and Mrs. Jim Williams.

Of course there was no building during the war. Afterwards, when it was learned that the base was not temporary, planning was begun. Churches and schools were enlarged, housing units built, water and sewerage expanded, burbs and gutters put in, a voluntary fire department started and mail delivery begun. Old town and new have met for a better Millington in which to live.

**All dates are approximate.*



Sigler Supply - One Of The First General Supply Stores In Millington



A Look Inside Sigler Supply - Goods To Supply A Growing Town

MILLINGTON WAS SHELBY'S FIRST CENTER FOR FLYING

Shelby County's aviation was born in Millington. Back in 1917, Uncle Sam established Shelby's first airport, Park Field, Millington.

Uncle Sam brought planes to Park Field. Many war birds were trained for the battlefields. At the close of the war, Park Field loomed as a possibility for the leading commercial airport for the battlefields. At the close of the war, Park Field loomed as a possibility for the leading commercial airport for Memphis.

Developments in airports, like aviation, have been rapid and Park Field was cast aside.

Thelma Sigler Williams

Thelma Sigler Williams

Credit for the notes on Park Field go to an unknown author.